Prologue: Endings and Beginnings

I sat at my desk in silence, looking at the data on screen. The energy build up was steady in the E6 region, showing no signs of stopping.

We didn't have access to visuals in that region anymore after the AI for the entire region locked us out.

That had been about 10 years ago, and I'd just now been able to break through the security.

10 years…

I shook my head, trying to shake my guilt, but like always it wouldn't go away. Even a reset hadn't erased it, after I found the document I'd left myself less than a year after. I was too good at my job not to find out what I'd done to my best friend.

The worst part is he and his wife had been right. The chance of catastrophic failure had already almost destroyed three other sectors, and we'd had to disable the sky after another accident.

I looked towards the projection of the stars I kept on display of my wall, the faintly moving lights making me sigh. *We need to fix this.*

I started typing on my keyboard, going to the staff registry. I couldn't head down, but the system that injected people into the mooks still worked. It was automated like half the place, and unlike exterior systems, it was actively monitored.

But I still had access. And I still had his data. I could at least fix part of my mistakes, even if it wouldn't be perfect. On tip of that, he wouldn't be able to stop himself from interfering, once he knew.

It could work. But can I do it without being detected? Probably not. So, I'd need a backup.

I started digging through the systems and scheduled an update for myself. My body froze for several minutes as the process took hold. Pellent would be happy at least. He's been worried I'd lose years and have to relearn several of the modifications from scratch. *Not that I'll be around much longer if this works.*

With my preparations done, I started working. Not wanting to risk anything, I scheduled a copy of myself to upload later, burying it in several protocols for the main system.

Then I started working on finding a suitable host. Wincing, there were only two viable options if I wanted him capable of doing something now instead of later.

Did that guys arm get ripped off? Shit, only one choice then. He won't be happy, but it's what I've got.

Suddenly, alarms started going off. They must have had someone watching for this. *Fuck. I'm going to need to shortcut this.*

I got to work, typing as fast as I could, working to finish before someone came to stop me.

After almost 30 minutes, I started to hear banging at my door. Soon after, the metal began to heat around the edge. They weren't playing around.

With a sigh of regret, I quickly typed out a message for him when he woke up. Hopefully it would help give him direction. Maybe he'd even believe my apology.

Luckily, I'd gotten the core process finished. The rest was hidden. *Sorry Alex. I did the best I could.*

Rather than let them take me, I pulled out the laser pistol I kept in my desk. *This is going to suck.*

In another place, a man stands over a body, blood splattered over his face and clothes. He stared down at the body of a girl, crumpled against the brick wall of the alley, throat slashed open and clothing torn for easier access. It had been so easy, toying with the noble and forcing her to do what he wanted. There was nothing he loved more than paying them back for all the shit he had to go through.
He pulled out a small crystal and activated it. Soon a small wave of mana washed over his body, removing any stains, dirt, and even the blood. It looked as though his clothing had been freshly laundered and he'd just finished bathing by the time the wave was done. It then crashed back into the crystal before it crumpled into dust and faded away.
Wiping his hands together to remove any dust, he started to head out of the alley, leaving the broken body for someone else to find. He still had to get home before his wife started in on him. If only she could be dealt with as easily. But then he'd be responsible for the brats.
But even thinking about them couldn't change his excellent mood. As he turned down another alley to get to the main street, he started whistling a jaunty tune with a faint smile on his face, pulling off the mask that had covered the top half of his face and storing it his jacket pocket. Leaving, he didn't notice as the body began to faintly glow.

<System Restoration in Progress>

The girl's torn out throat began to knit itself back together slowly. Bruises on her face, arms and legs began to fade as if they'd never been there. Internal injuries slowly patching themselves together. Even with all these fixes though, the girl was still unmoving.

<Beginning transfer>
<Transfer: 8%>
<Transfer: 15%>
<Transfer: 37%>

Slowly, the girl's chest began to rise and fall, though an unsettling rattle still came from her. Almost as if something was preventing her from taking in full breaths.

<Transfer: 64%>
<Error: Transfer interrupted>
<Retrying>
<Unable to connect to server>
<Backup Protocol initiated.>

The girl's body jerked, her whole body tensing, as she began to glow brighter. Her arms and fingers spasmed as some unseen change happened beneath the surface.

<Modifying User System>
<Class Reset to Base Level>
<Stats Reset to Base Level>

<Ckass Change Restrictions Lifted>
<Moderator Menu Access Granted>
<Tutorials Reinitialized>
<Customization Shop Access Granted>
<Statistics Modified>
<+1 to Mana>
<+1 to Mana Control>
<+1 to Mana Power>
<Spell Added: Healing Tier 0>
<Spell Added: Scan Tier 0>
<Trait Added: Experience Conversion>
<Trait Added: Experience Absorbstion>
<Trait Added: Moderator's Veil>
<Shop Token x1 Added>

Slowly, her body relaxed, and the glow began to fade. Her body was still covered in her own blood, her clothes still torn and cut in various places. But her injuries were all but gone.
Suddenly, her eyes flashed open, and she started to cough uncontrollably. Leaning over to the side, she started to throw up, dark fluid coming out of her mouth. It only made the metallic stench of the alley stronger, now with a hint of bile.
Once done, she kept coughing, more fluid leaving her lungs, causing her to shift to her hands and knees as she tried to get it all out. When she was done, she rolled over and collapsed on the ground, massaging her chest since her lungs still burned from coughing so much.
As her hand touched her breast, her brow furrowed and she looked down. She squeezed lightly a few times, making sure she wasn't imagining things before looking down and running her hands along her body. Her frown only deepened.
Sitting up slowly, using her hands to help brace her still weak body, she looked around in confusion. She moved her legs a little to check that they were working properly and actually hers. They were pale and undefined, like she'd never walked or ran anywhere.
She looked at her hands, flexing her fingers. They were dainty and frail, never having done any difficult work before.
Standing up, she leaned against the wall and groaned. Letting out a sigh, she grumbled under her breath. "Why the hell am I so short?"

Status

Name: Danielle Rosecrest
Age: 17
Race: Human
Class: Noble 1
Class EXP: 0/100
Experience Bank: 0/1000

Statistics

Physical
Strength: 8
Dexterity: 12
Agility: 12
Endurance: 10
Constitution: 8

Mental
Intelligence: 12
Insight: 8
Charisma: 10
Perception: 10

Magic
Mana: 1
Mana Control: 1
Mana Power: 1

Skills
None

Traits
Noble Birth
Experience Conversion
Experience Absorbtion
Moderator's Veil
Second Chance

Spells
Healing: Tier 0 Rank 1
Scan: Tier 0 Rank 1

Chapter 1: The Kindness of Strangers

My world was currently pain. Mostly in my chest, but it felt like somebody had lit the ends of my nerves on fire and left them to smolder. My head was fuzzy, and it was hard to focus on what was in front of me with how blurry my vision was from the tears in my eyes. I used my arm to rub at them and it only helped a little.

On top of that, I was fucking short.

I don't know why that was the part I was focused on. My memories felt fuzzy, like they were just out of reach, but some would be crystal clear. I'd apparently used to be short, but had done something to increase my height. I don't remember what, but I got the feeling it wasn't going to be easy to do that again.

Shaking my head, I winced and started to follow the wall, leaning against it a little as I still felt weak and a little wobbly. I tried to at least pull my mind into the right mode to focus on the now, and worry about the how, what, and why later. And probably the who, specifically he was.

That was the part that bothered him the most. Trying to drag a name, a face, or even a description. I knew I was in the wrong body, that was certain. I was fairly confident I was missing some equipment and had some things added.

I lowered my hand, resisting the urge to touch my boob again. Even as small as it was, it was still there, and I'm sure I'd have time to explore myself when I was somewhere that wasn't an alley. Nothing good happened in alleys.

I walked along the cobbled stone alley, taking turns as they appeared. Once, I thought I saw a small person look at me, but they vanished before I could get a clear look. *Was that a child?* It didn't register as important to my mind, just an idle curiosity.

I finally came to a street lit by lamps the hung from metal arches that crossed the street above it. They radiated a soft, yellowed light that repelled the shadows of the night. I looked left and saw more lamps heading towards some lit up buildings. I looked right and saw a towering gate connected to a wall with people patrolling atop.

Take a chance with the gatehouse, or try my luck with the… bars? Taverns? My brain hurt trying to figure it out so I stopped trying.

After a few moments of staring at the gatehouse, I turned left. Nothing good came from trusting authority. At least not authorities you didn't know.

I slowly made my way down the street, and I finally got a good look at my clothes. Or, what remained of them. They barely hid anything as they were, and mostly hung off me like rags. They'd probably been nice before that.

They were also coated in an incredible amount of blood. Enough that it stuck to my skin and weighed my clothes down somewhat. It was especially annoying with the scraps of skirt that were left, though it was probably the least damaged of the bunch.

I look like someone murdered me. Which, considering the smell of that alley, might've been the case. *What a way to wake up.*

With that thought, I continued until I got to the lit up building. It was near a bunch of other, similar building, but they were all mostly dark.

I stumbled against the door and leaned against it, trying to push it open. Only then did I notice the door handle and roll my eyes. *How did I forget how doors worked?* I turned the handle and stumbled inside.

“Hey, we're closed! Didn't you read the… sign…” The voice trailed off as I stumbled in, likely just getting a good look at me. I looked up to see who I was dealing with.
It was a heavy set man wearing suspenders over a brown shirt. Across the bar from him was balding man wearing a dark green robe with yellow trim and a man wearing bulky armor with dark, short cut hair.
Suddenly the balding man stood up and walked over, “Greg, boil some water and a clean rag. Severn, get a tankard and some water from behind the bar.”
As the other two moved to follow his orders, he approached and put a gentle hand on my shoulder, guiding me to a nearby table. I didn’t fight it, though I was a little surprised. *Maybe I look worse than I thought.*
He turned a chair so I could sit facing him and he looked into my eyes. “You look lucid enough, do I have your permission to treat you?”
I started to nod, but he had his hands on either side of my head, holding me steady. It seemed the small movement was enough as his eyes began to glow a soft green color. A moment later, his hands began to glow as well with the same faint green light. I could feel the soreness in my throat fade away.
“No serious wounds. Some abrasions in your throat, from coughing, am I correct?” I said yes and he nodded, “There was also fluid in your lungs that I’m working to get rid of, seems like blood, and it wouldn’t be good if that stayed in there.”
Not really having anything to input, I just let him work as my eyes took in the rest of the room.
The armored man, who I think was Severn, came over with a tankard of water, “What’s your name, girl?” He took a swig from another tankard and the man in front of me gave him an annoyed look.
“Greg’s going to start charging you more if he catches you refilling your own tankard.” Even as he talked, I could feel a pressure slowly fading away in my chest. I hadn’t even realized how bad it had been, more focused on other issues.
“I’ll pay him for it. I don’t feel comfortable when he pours me free drinks anyway.” He set his tankard down and took a seat at the table. Then he pulled out a small notepad from somewhere I didn’t see. “And because this is outside of what I can ignore, we might as well start a report. Judging by the blood I’m seeing, this girl was almost certainly assaulted.”
I blinked a few times and looked down at myself, agreeing with his assessment. “That’s what I thought too. Especially if all the blood I woke up surrounded by was mine…”
Severn scribbled something down. “So you were unconscious and woke up in this state? Do you remember anything from before you lost consciousness?”
I tried to think, frowning as I couldn’t think of anything. Everything was sort of jumbled together. I didn’t even know where I was and said as much.
“Nothing? Have you tried bringing up your status recently? It might have some clues to what happened.” He scribbled more onto his notepad.
“My what?” I asked, confused.
The man in front of me frowned, “Your status. It should at least display your name and class as well as traits you might have. Try focusing on bringing it up.”
I did as I was told and jerked back as my vision filled with a transparent screen full of numbers and other things. “Uh… it says my name is… Daniel Rosecrest.”
Severn wrote it down, “Age and class?”

I read them off, “Seventeen, and Noble Level 1” I didn’t know what any of it meant.
Severn paused in his writing and the man in front of me looked over at him with a furrowed brow. The armored man gave me a stern look, “Now’s not the time to lie. What’s your actual level?”
Shrugging my shoulders, “I’m just saying what’s there. I’ve got a few traits too, though I don’t know what any of them mean.”
Sighing the man in front of me let go of my head and stood up, his magic fading soon after. “Focus on the one you want information for and a description should pop up. Also, I fixed some issues that might have come up later, though if your memory is as bad as it seems I might want to have Greg’s wife explain it to you.”
I didn’t get what he meant, but did as he said. The last one on the list looked the most interesting.

Second Chance
Congratulations! You died. However, unlike others, you got better. Since you defied death once, you should be able to do it again, right? Once per month, you can be fully healed from death at the greater cost of 1 Class level or the total amount of banked experience available. Try not to make it a habit.

“Uh… according to the Second Chance trait, I did die.” That message had seemed far too cheery for something so grim.
The man who had healed me looked hard at Severn, “And that is my sign to leave. If she’s back from the dead, that’s the work of the divine, and I wasn’t alerted so it wasn’t Melrose.” He looked at me, “If you need any further healing, you can make an appointment at the church, though I’d keep that trait to yourself.”
Without another word, he left in a hurry, leaving a frowning Severn and a baffled Greg just coming out of the kitchen, followed by a short and stocky woman who looked almost as wide as she was tall wearing a simple green dress covered by a white apron and holding a bundle of clothes.
“What the hell was that about? I’ve never seen him move that fast.” Greg said, coming over with the bucket and a rag.
“Don’t worry about it.” Severn said, closing the notepad. “Martha, if you could give us another couple minutes, I’d like to ask a few more questions of Danielle here.”
“Sure, I can get her something to eat, I think we at least have some rolls left from dinner.” She headed back through the door she’d come from, dragging Greg by his belt before he started walking with.
Once they were out of sight, Severn lowered his voice. “Pearson was right. Don’t let anyone know about that trait. They’ll put more importance on it than it likely deserves.”
Nodding, I asked, “I take it coming back from the dead isn’t looked at positively?”
Severn snorted, “Usually the opposite, though some people will claim it’s against the natural order of things.” He reopened the notepad, “Can you tell me approximately where you woke up? If you’re up to it, I’d like you to show me as well, but that can wait until Martha cleans you up a bit.”

“Um, I came out just down the street. I looked both ways and saw the gate with all the guards and this place and thought this would be better.” Which apparently it had been. The guards probably wouldn’t have had someone who could fix what Pearson had.
“Why not?” Severn asked.
I shook my head, “I don’t really know. It felt right, I guess?” I was not going to tell what was obviously someone with the guard, or maybe military, that I didn’t want to trust authority. *At least until I figure a few more things out.*
“Uh huh.” Severn said, “And how far down the alley were you?”
Does he not believe me?

<Congratulations! You’ve unlocked a new skill!>
Skill Gained: Assessment Tier 0, Rank 1

I flinched and read the alert. I concentrated on the skill.

Assessment
Tier 0: You have a vague idea of what people are thinking, though only the most obvious of things will get thought that thick skull of yours. It is now easier to parse a person’s emotional state and validity of their statements by a minor amount.

Severn looked at me with concern, “Something wrong?”
I shook my head, “Just something popped up, don’t think it’s important. I took two turns, I think. I was still trying to pull myself together.”
Nodding, the man flipped the notepad closed, “I think that’s enough for now. I’ll head to the guardhouse and get a couple of guards to investigate the scene. If it’s as bad as you say, it’ll be the fifth one this year. The rest of the Nobles are not going to be happy about that.”
“Wait, what?” I asked, concerned, “This has happened before?”
“Well, none of the others came back to life, but yes. I’d recommend staying away from this part of the city when we figure out how to get you home. It’s not safe.” He stood up and put a reassuring hand on my shoulder. If his hand hadn’t engulfed my entire shoulder and then some, it might have been more comforting.
Severn headed for the door and then said over his shoulder, “I’ll be back within the hour, let Greg and Martha know for me.”
And then he was gone. Greg and Martha must have been listening at the door, because they were out in the dining area soon after he left. Martha looked me over and seemed to go pale.
“Oh, gem, you’ve been through something harsh.” She set the basket of rolls on the table and grabbed the rag in the bucket of hot water. She then started scrubbing at my face and neck, “I’ll get you cleaned up.” The stocky woman turned to Greg, “I’ll take care of this. Make sure the door is locked and see about getting her something besides bread rolls, dear.”
Greg nodded, “Of course. I think there’s still some potatoes that should cook up quick.” He locked the door and went to the back, leaving me alone with Martha.
“Alright dear, out of those. It’s just use girls now and there’s no point getting changed while covered in blood.” She had gone back to scrubbing my neck, and I could see the rag was already stained a dark red.

“Thanks… I think I can take care of cleaning myself.” I said, standing up and peeling the remnants of my shirt off. It came off easily and I looked around for somewhere to put it.
“Just drop it on the ground, I’ll clean it all up later. Or make Greg do it.” She snorted at what I assumed was a joke.

Assessment has ranked up
Assessmentt: Tier 0, Rank 2

I blinked the notification away and sighed before pulling off the skirt. If I’d had any underwear, it was definitely missing. If Martha noticed, she didn’t comment, and I did my best to scrub off the worst of the blood and grim. Meanwhile, she was holding up dresses to try and see if any would fit.
She finally settled on one that was dark green and laid it out on the table, “Think this is the best I got. It’ll be loose in the shoulders, and probably a bit short in the hem.”
Considering the woman was shorter than I was, I wasn’t surprised. “Thank you. Sorry about making a mess of the..”
“None of that, gem. Something terrible happened to you and anyone without stone in their heart would do their best to help.” She patted my bare shoulder, which felt more comforting than Severn’s, despite also covering most of my shoulder as well. *What’s with everyone having huge hands?*
Once I was cleaned up the best I could, with Martha’s help in places I couldn’t reach, I threw the dress on over my head. She’d been right about the shoulders being loose. If I sneezed wrong, they’d fall down my arms. The hem also came up to my knees, which wasn’t too bad. It wouldn’t be hard to walk in, at least. *It’s a lot better than what I was wearing.*
“Hm, you wear that pretty well. Knew I made a good choice.” She looked at the pile on the floor. “And I’d suggest burning those. They’re beyond saving.”
I nodded, but my mouth was too full from a bread roll I’d grabbed and started eating. It was a little dry, but I was hungry. Like I hadn’t eaten in days. *Probably a side effect of coming back to life.*
With that, she went to the back, to talk with Greg I assumed. Meanwhile, I turned my attention to something that had been blinking in my vision the entire time. There were two little icons blinking in the bottom right of my vision. I hadn’t been paying attention to them because of everything, but they looked similar enough to the screens, so I assumed it was more of that kind of thing.
I focused on the one that looked like a rectangle with an upside down triangle in the center of it. A new screen appeared that said <Inbox> at the top. There was one highlighted item and I focused on that. A message showed up on screen. It started with, “I’m sorry, Alex.”

Status

Name: Danielle Rosecrest
Age: 17
Race: Human
Class: Noble 1

Class EXP: 14/100
Experience Bank: 0/1000

Statistics

Physical
Strength: 8
Dexterity: 12
Agility: 12
Endurance: 10
Constitution: 8

Mental
Intelligence: 12
Insight: 8
Charisma: 10
Perception: 10

Magic
Mana: 1
Mana Control: 1
Mana Power: 1

Skills
Assessment: Tier 0, Rank 2

Traits
Noble Birth
Experience Conversion
Experience Absorbtion
Moderator's Veil
Second Chance

Spells
Healing: Tier 0 Rank 1
Scan: Tier 0 Rank 1

Chapter 2: Regrets

I'm sorry, Alex.
What I did to you is unforgivable, and if you remember I wouldn't blame you for hating me. I'm going to be selfish and hope you don't, though. I'd like my best friend back. Even if I don't deserve it.
I don't have a lot of time to write this, pretty sure they're going to break in any minute. There are three nearby power spikes in the area surrounding the city you should wind up in, if everything worked out and you resurrected in Danielle Rosecrest's body. Sorry about that, by the way, it was her or the guy who was bleeding out and missing an arm. The system can do a lot, but the arm would have taken longer than we had.
Right, keeping on track. The power spikes aren't an immediate concern, but if they aren't taken care of, they could. I'm unsure of how the problems are occurring, but it looks like the cores are taking excess energy from somewhere, and I can't track that due to the restrictions I've got.
The core AIs should be able to help diagnose the problem, if you can't. I don't know how much of you is there, but I'm hoping enough that your curiosity and drive will send you investigating.
Hey, maybe you can get back at the guy who killed Danielle while your at it. It'd be within your power.
I couldn't restore Admin access, but you have Moderator privileges. Read the manual if you have any questions. It can be found in the Vendal main menu. It can be accessed by thinking about it, if you forget. Just think Vendal Menu.
Shit, alright I'm out of time, do what you do best, man. If my plan works out, I'll send you another message. If it doesn't… well it was nice knowing you.

Melvin

I read it a couple of times, not really understanding a lot of it. One thing though: The name Alex felt right. Moreso than Danielle, anyway. Whoever this Melvin was, he I got the feeling we had a complicated relationship.
I was about to access the menu he'd said when Greg came back out with a tray. He set a plate down in front of me that held a still warm potato, cut open and coated in butter. Then a fork joined the plate. "It's not much, but on short notice, it's the quickest thing I could prepare."
"Thank you, Greg. I appreciate what you and Martha have done for me. The other two as well."
I took the fork and started to stir the inside of the potato from the cut, mixing the butter into the center. Once it was cool enough, I took a bite and let out a pleased hum. It was delicious.
Greg smirked and put his hands on his hips, "Good to see even a rush job gets a satisfied reaction. Drink some water. You're a little young, but when you're done I'll get you something a little stronger."
"I still think the drinking laws are stupid." Martha said, coming back with another bucket and a mop. "Seriously, you can join the guard or military training at fifteen, but no drinking till you're eighteen? Such a stupid rule. Dwarves practically drink alcohol from birth."
"Yes, dear. You've told me about your alcoholic family enough that I know." He said, falling into what seemed like an old argument.

“Ha, you haven’t seen an alcoholic dwarf before. Even then, you wouldn’t be able to satisfy one with the whole bar.” She said, taking pride in what I guessed was her… race? Species? *Just going to move on from figuring that out.*

Greg took the destroyed clothes and tossed them into the bucket I’d used to wash up before grabbing a mop and started cleaning up the floor. “Please, you know I have a special menu for dwarves. You helped pick them out. I can’t even drink the stuff to enjoy it with you.”

“Pfft, lightweight. Disgrace for a tavern owner.” Even though she said that, she grabbed his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. Her hand was larger than even Greg’s, though not by much. “How will you make it up to me?”

Greg flushed a light shade of pink, “Martha… not in front of the girl.”

She let go of his hand and gave him a light tap in the stomach. “Finish mopping and I’ll get rid of this.” Taking the wash bucket, she headed into the back.

I ate as Greg cleaned up my mess, enjoying the quiet room and simple food. Even the water tasted amazing, though I might’ve just been thirsty.

“Hopefully you Severn can get ahold of your home in the morning. I’m not up to date on Noble affairs, but someone probably noticed you missing. It shouldn’t take too long. Worse case, you can hit up a Melrose shelter. They’ve got a few women’s shelters near their main church.” He finished up and stuck the mop into the bucket, leaning it against the wall before taking a seat.

Chewing as I thought, I considered his words. “Might work as a backup plan. I don’t want to take advantage of your kindness.”

Greg waved me off, “Nonsense. We’ve got room, and are doing well enough.”

A knock sounded at the front door and Greg went over and unlocked the door. Severn and two guards walked in. It was hard to tell with their breast plates and helmets, but it looked like one was male, and the other was female. “Thanks Greg.” He said, smiling at the bartender.

Severn turned to me and his expression grew a little more somber. “Danielle, you look better. Do you need another minute, or are you ready to show us where you woke up?”

I drained my tankard of water before standing up. “Sooner we do this, sooner it’s done.” I didn’t know where that came from, but like the name Alex, it felt right.

Severn nodded, “These are Louis and Petra. They’re here as an escort. I already sent a runner to the Rosecrest estate, so someone should be by in the morning to collect you.”

I scratched the back of my neck, nervous about that. I’d thought I’d at least have a day before meeting anyone who knew Danielle. *Looks like I’m playing this blind.* “Alright, well let’s get going then, I guess.”

We headed out of the tavern and went down the street towards the gate into the city. About halfway down the street, I turned into an alley. Lights soon came from behind as one of the guards, I think it was Petra, held up a crystal.

Using the light, I tried to remember the turns I made.

Eventually, I didn't have to wander around as the overpowering metallic stench of blood came from around the corner. Severn held out a hand motioning them to stop. He then pulled out his own crystal and looked to the one holding the other. “Petra, stay with Danielle. No need for her to see this again.”

Petra nodded and the other two headed around the corner. I heard an audible gasp, and then sound of someone throwing up. Petra looked to me like I'd know what was going on, but I just shrugged.

After some time, I couldn't tell how long, Severn and a distinctly ill looking Louis came around the corner again. Petra asked in a rough voice, "That bad?"
“Between the blood on the ground and the spray along the walls? Pretty bad. Same as the others.” He took out a cloth and wiped his hands before handing it to Louis, who used the clean part to wipe his mouth of bile.
“Shit.” She looked over at me and tried to give a reassuring smile, “Don't worry though. Your safe for now.”
I wasn't worried. I probably should have been. Now that I thought about it, I should have been freaking out this entire time. I was in an unfamiliar body, woke up in a pool of blood, and don't know where I am. *Maybe there some kind of hidden trauma suppression skill at work or something.* Nothing I could do about it. So no use worrying.
Instead, I let Petra lead me back to Greg's tavern while Severn and Louis continued looking over the scene. Petra left me with a wave of her hand as Greg let me inside.
With a sigh, he led me to a set of stairs in the back. “Alright, Martha got a spare bed set up for ya.”
The room I was led to was rather small. Greg could probably reach out with both arms and touch the walls with his fingertips. Inside was a small cot with a heavy blanket on the bottom and a lighter one on top. There was a small sack that when I checked was filled with some spare clothes.
He scratched the back of his head, “Yea, it’s not grand, but we don’t have a lot of room. Don’t get many guests.” He stepped out into the hall, turning a lantern down low. “There’s a toilet down the stairs and out the back. If you need anything, we’re in the other room. Should be up close to midday.”
I nodded, “Thanks for this. A lot.” Meeting these people had been the luckiest thing I could have done. Things could have been a lot worse than a cramped room and uncomfortable bed.
“Goodnight, Greg.”
He gave me a big smile, “Good night, Danielle.” He closed the door behind him, and I sat down on the cot. I leaned my back against the wall and sighed.
Between the message I’d gotten and the guards, I’d ignored some of the other blinking images in the corner of my vision. I didn’t want to get distracted.
I still didn’t feel like checking them. Everything was just… a lot. Probably not even two hours ago, I’d woken up covered in blood. I should be freaking out. A broken down mess of a person, either unresponsive or sobbing in some corner.
All I really felt was… nothing. I didn’t have any connection to before. Yes, it was concerning, frightening even. But it was like it had happened to someone else. *Which, I suppose it did. What were you doing Danielle? Why were you in an alley at night, away from the safety of your home? No weapons I could find. No money. Who did this to you?*
It was a question that would likely dwell with me for a long while. Maybe I could look for the answers, like the message had said. Get vengeance for a girl whose sacrifice brought me here. However it happened.
Who are you, Melvin? And who was I?
Alex… was that my name?
Should it still be? Or should I try and live as Danielle?

It was a question that needed an answer that I didn't have. Not yet. I'd wait and see how tomorrow went.
With nothing else to do, and not the least bit tired, I focused on the first of the icons.

<Welcome to the Vendal Tutorial!>

Status

Name: Danielle Rosecrest
Age: 17
Race: Human
Class: Noble 1
Class EXP: 14/100
Experience Bank: 0/1000

Statistics

Physical
Strength: 8
Dexterity: 12
Agility: 12
Endurance: 10
Constitution: 8

Mental
Intelligence: 12
Insight: 8
Charisma: 10
Perception: 10

Magic
Mana: 1
Mana Control: 1
Mana Power: 1

Skills
Assessment: Tier 0, Rank 2

Traits
Noble Birth
Experience Conversion
Experience Absorbtion
Moderator's Veil
Second Chance

Spells
Healing: Tier 0 Rank 1
Scan: Tier 0 Rank 1

Chapter 3: Tutorials

<Welcome to the Vendal Tutorial!>

The message filled my vision, and despite trying to wave it away, it didn't disappear.

<This tutorial is here to go over the basic systems of Vendal, cover various rules, explore the system menus, and introduce you to the class system.>
<Please, get comfortable, and focus on the Continue button when you are ready>

I looked around the almost pitch black room, with only the faint glow coming from under the door. Shrugging lightly, I just focused on the large 'Continue' button.

<The first thing to cover is the character sheet. We will go over the information provided, and how to bring up certain display elements to make them easier to see without bringing up the full sheet every time.>

My sheet then opened on it's own. Parts of it were highlighted as new messages kept appearing. It was telling me things that were pretty obvious, since the stats were pretty self explanatory. Strength made you lift more and hit harder. Perception made you see and hear better.
Insight was a little odd, mostly related to forming connections between things. Charisma wasn't about being good with people, but how you projected yourself to others. It was more of a dial, apparently, able to be turned up or down with some focus. And Intelligence didn't make me smarter, just easier to memorize and recall information.
Mana, Mana Control, and Mana Power were pretty obvious too, but supposedly I wasn't supposed to have it. Apparently it could only be unlocked by taking a magic based class, or training with a magic teacher. *I'll take the shortcut. Sounds like it would have been a pain.*
Skills were earned by doing things related to them. I assessed Severn, so I got the skill for it. I'd probably get a skill for running or climbing if I tried them. *Might be a good idea.*
What I hadn't known was that when a skill Tiered up, I'd gain statistic points. The example used was Running granting +1 Agility and Reading giving +1 Intelligence. *I wonder what other ways there are to increase them.*
Traits were gained through special actions, like the Second Chance one I'd gotten. The example was a bit tamer:

Monster Slayer 1
You've killed 10 monsterous creatures and taken a step towards making the world safer. For a few minutes. Keep going, you'll make a difference. Probably.

Someone had a sense of humor when writing these. I figured whoever had was likely bored when they'd done it. I would be too, writing all this out. Because learning that you got new spells by… learning new spells. That's all it said.
Things then got more interesting.

<Next we'll talk about how Experience works in the world of Vendall>
<Experience is earned through everyday actions for most of the residents of the world. A baker earns Experience from baking, a guard for guarding, a miner for mining, and so on.>
<Additionally, everyone is able to gain more experience through the slaying of monstrous creatures, delving dungeons, and completing unique challenges.>
<It's important to earn Experience, since it is what is used for everything. There are two spots for it on your sheet.>
<Class Experience is experience that is gained by fufililling your classes role in the world.>
<Class Experience can be used to level your Class, or converted into Banked Experience.>
<Banked Experience is used as a currency in a variety of system functions, as well as for day to day trade.>
<The amount of Banked Experience one can hold is limited, though you can expand it by spending the maximum amount to double your capacity.>
<Class Experience can be earned up to 2 Levels worth in excess of the maximum total before it is automatically converted to Banked Experience.>
<Banked Experience beyond it's current capacity will fall to the ground as Personal Experience Crystals (PEC)>
<PEC can be converted back to Banked Experience at any node, or through other means, like banks and merchants.>

Frowning, I checked my status screen again and saw the two traits there: Experience Converseion and Experience Absorption.

Experience Conversion
Converts Banked Experience into Personal Experience Crystals of the specified value. Can also be used to convert Banked Experience into Class Experience at a rate of 4 to 1.

Experience Absorption
Converts Personal Experience Crystals into Banked Experience.

Does this mean I can ignore using banks and… nodes? What are those? I continued reading, but the explanation wasn't coming.

<Congratulations!>
<This concluded the Character Screen Tutorial>
<100 Class Experience gained>

Wait, doesn't that mean I have enough to go up a level? How does that work? I looked over to my character sheet and focused on the class.

<u>Class:</u> Noble
The noble is a unique class that one is either born into, or earned for great deeds or wealth. Those of the Noble class gain access to a number of benefits otherwise unavailable, including 3

additional bonus stats to apply where desired, instead of the typical 1. This trait is obtained at level 1 and transfers into any class acquired, as well as the title addition of Noble. For example, Noble Elementalist or Noble Warrior. The class itself is based upon diplomacy, court intrigue, and management of estates, thus it's skill bonuses revolve around it.

+1 to Charisma per level
+1 to Intelligence per level
+1 to Insight per level
+3 free attribute points per level
Bonus to skill acquisition for related skills
10% increase in skill leveling for related skills

That's not what I wanted, but good to know. I tried focusing on the full experience counter and got a better response.

<Would you like to spend 100 EXP to increase your level?>
<Yes> <No>

I focused on <Yes> and frowned as a wave of tingling seemed to spread through me, focused mostly around my head. It faded after a few seconds, but I still shook my head trying to get rid of any left over weirdness. I didn't really notice any difference, but all three of those seemed like 'invisible' stats that weren't obvious. Those were often the most useful, though. *But why do I think that?*
I also had 3 more points to spend, so I looked through my character sheet. *I've got Strength, Constitution, and Insight under level 10 still, not even considering the Mana skills. I don't even know what those do, so I'll hold off on those for now.*
Which left me with the first three. Insight would go up at my next level, which was at 200 EXP, so I'd leave that alone. That left Strength and Constituion. Strength would make lifting things easier and I'd hit harder, but I don't know how much fighting I'd be doing yet. Constitution would improve my body in less defined, but important ways, like increased durability and resistance to diseases and poisons.
I made my choice and dropped two into Constituion and one into Strength, which sent more of that tingling throughout my body. It seemed to settle around the middle of my body and among the muscles in my arms and legs. Again, it went away fairly quickly, but I still shook my arms out to try and get rid of the phantom feeling.
After adjusting, I focused on where the tutorial had shrinked down to in the bottom right, bringing it back to the focus.

<System Functions>
<There are a number of system functions that will be used on a regular basis, and a few less common ones.>
<In order of importance are: Character Sheet, Skill List, Spell List, Alerts, Shop, and Inbox>
<The Character Sheet has already been covered in the previous tutorial>
<The Skill List can be brought up by focusing on the phrase 'Skill List'>

<The Skill List will list out all of your skills, the abilities gained from these skills, and progress till the next skill Rank/Tier.>
<Skills can be sorted by Category, Alphabetically, or Order of Aquisition. The Default is Order of Aquisition.>
<The Spell List can be brought up by focusing on the phrase 'Spell List' or 'Spell Book'>
<The Spell List will list out all of your spells, including modifiers acquired through use or training, and progress till the next Rank/Tier in the spell.>
<Spells can be sorted by Category, Elemental Affinity, Alphabetically, or Order of Aquisition. The Default is Order of Aquisiton.>
<Alerts are notifications that appear in the corner of your vision. The placement can be adjusted by changing the settings in your HUD Options, available through the Vendal Main Menu.>
<The Shop is where EXP can be used to purchase new traits, skills, spells, abilities, or system functions. The price will fluctuate based on training already done to gain or improve any of those traits. Requirements for some abilities can also be seen here.>
<New system functions are often proprietary features that were deemed of lesser importance, or unnecessary for large numbers of the general population. Each one requires EXP to use.>
<Popular optional purchases are: Quest Log, Encyclopedia, and Map.>
<Note: Some of these features can be unlocked through acquisition of specific classes>
<The Inbox is for communicating with other users over long distances in written form. For a fee proportionate to how far away the users are, messages can be sent from anywhere to anywhere. Replies can be sent for free if the sender pays an additional fee, or a reduced cost.>
<The Inbox is also where messages are stored and can be referenced for later, including received, sent, or drafted messages. Messages are stored until deleted.>
<Congratulations!>
<This concluded the General System Tutorial>
<100 Class Experience gained>

Wait, another 100? Just for that? And some of those shop features seemed useful, so I pulled it up real quick to investigate.
After some looking, the cheapest options I found were to improve my Strength and Insight for 500 EXP each, with the next highest being the Encyclopedia and Note functions for 1000 EXP each. I checked through a few more options and finally found the Quest Tab.
It cost 10,000 EXP.
I can't even hold that much yet. Shaking my head, I thought about it. *Would it even be worth getting before that kind of EXP was closer to what I needed to level? Probably not.*
I closed the shop, more annoyed than anything else.
Then I opened the next tutorial.

<Welcome to the Class Tutorial>
[Note: This feature has been modified by an external source.]
[Compiling changes…]
[Compiling complete!]
[Resuming Tutorial]

<This tutorial is to teach about the Vendal class system and give an idea of the options available, both immediately and in the future.>
<To start, please focus on the name of your current class.>

I opened up my status window and did as the tutorial said. Suddenly my vision shifted and I could see a number of small dots in my vision, with a really bright one in the center.

<The node in the center represents your current class. Everyone in Vendal has a base class that they are born into and gives certain advantages for the rest of their lives based on how far they were able to take it before changing.>

The node brightened slightly and a box appeared.

Class: Noble
The noble is a unique class that one is either born into, or earned for great deeds or wealth. Those of the Noble class gain access to a number of benefits otherwise unavailable, including 3 additional bonus stats to apply where desired, instead of the typical 1. This trait is obtained at level 1 and transfers into any class acquired, as well as the title addition of Noble. For example, Noble Elementalist or Noble Warrior. The class itself is based upon diplomacy, court intrigue, and management of estates, thus it's skill bonuses revolve around it.

+1 to Charisma per level
+1 to Intelligence per level
+1 to Insight per level
+3 free attribute points per level
Bonus to skill acquisition for related skills
10% increase in skill leveling for related skills

The description I'd stumbled upon earlier lit up.

<Your base class will usually include the following:>
< - A Number of free attribute points that will carry over to new classes at level 10>
< - Some kind of Trait related to it that will upgrade as the class levels>
< - A Title to add onto future classes (optional)>

The class description disappeared and the Noble Trait description popped up.

Trait: Noble Birth
Great things are expected of you. Born into responsibility, given a head start, and often living a life of comfort, you are a Noble. Noble will be the base class you unlock upon reaching five years of age. Regardless of outside influence, your class and title cannot be taken away. Experience gain, by default, is increased by 10% for all classes.

I didn't have time to reflect much on how lucky I'd gotten, yet again, as the second I finished reading it, the description closed and more text appeared.

<Each base class has a different trait given at birth, and different restrictions or benefits. For instance, Street Rat gains increased Dexterity, Agility, and Perception per level in any class. They don't gain a title, but are able to naturally hide their class as any other they have access to, and increased skill acquisition and skill leveling for stealth and thievery related skills.>
<Meanwhile, a Commoner gains a total of 3 free stats points per level, with no other stats growth. They can pick one skill at levels 5 and 10, but are capped at level 10 for Commoner.>
<Let's talk about Class Advancement>
<There are six introductory classes that anyone can access regardless of skills, stats, or training.>
<Those classes are: Novice, Initiate, Trainee, Acolyte, Sneak, and Outdoorsman>

Class: Novice
A Novice has a desire to enter the artisanal arts, but has yet to decide what to do. They gain additional skill acquisition for Performance, Art, or Crafting skills, but no bonuses to skill leveling.

+1 to Dexterity per level
+1 to Perception per level
+1 to Insight per level
Max Level: 20
Increased Skill Acquisition for: Art, Crafting, and Performance based skills
Enhanced Focus trait

Class: Initiate
An Initiatte is one who has begun their journey into the magical arts. Whether you are an aspiring Elementalist, Mage, or Wizard, this class gives bonuses that will help all magic oriented classes. Note: This class does not provide Mana, Mana Control, or Mana Power. Those stats must be acquired through alternative means.

+1 to Intelligence per level
+1 to Perception per level
+1 to Insight per level
Max Level: 20
Increased Skill Aquisition for: Knowledge, Manipulation, and Meta skills.
Notepad system function unlocked

Class: Trainee
A Trainee has begun the path of physical combat. They spend their days training with weapons, exercise, and practicing forms. This class can branch out easily into various types of Warriors, Archers, or Soldiers. Increases Skill Aquisition and Leveling of most Combat, Tactical, or Movement skills.

+1 to Strength per level
+1 to Agility per level
+1 to Endurance per level
Max Level: 20
Increased Skill Aquisition for: Combat, Tactical, and Movement skills.
Second Wind trait

Class: Acolyte
An Acolyte puts their faith in something else, and draws on it for inspiration. An alternative magic based class, Acolytes often focus more and external sources of power than internal. This is the start of various Priest, Holy Warrior, or Druidic classes.

+1 to Insight per level
+1 to Intelligence per level
+1 to Charisma per level
Max Level: 20
Increased Skill Aquisition for: Communication, Knowledge, and Nature skills
External Mana trait acquired

Class: Sneak
Sneaks are classes that dislike standing out. The shadows and rooftops are their friends, and often find the belongings of others are now their own. Sneaks are the precursor to Thief, Rogue, or Scout oriented classes.

+1 to Agility per level
+1 to Dexterity per level
+1 to Perception per level
Max Level: 20
Increased Skill Aquisition for: Stealth, Perception, and Movement skills
Misdirection trait acquired

Class: Outdoorsman
Outdoorsman are comfortable away from cities and towns. They would rather travel the forests and fields than settle down. An Outdoorsman focuses on hunting, gathering, or harvesting to provide for themselves or others.

+1 Endurance per level
+1 Constitution per level
+1 Perception per level
Max Level: 20
Increased Skill Aquisition for: Hunting, Harvesting, and Tracking skills
Backpacking trait acquired

<As you can see, each of the early classes provide a different set of skills to aid in your development. There is no restriction on switching between the base classes, but once a more advanced class has been chosen, the other categories will be locked out, as your path will have been chosen.>
[Amendment: Due to modifications, this lockout does not apply to you.]
<When you are ready, simply focus on the node relating to the class you desire and a prompt will appear, asking to confirm your choice.>
<Please choose your path with care.>
<Congratulations!>
<This concluded the Class System Tutorial>
<100 Class Experience gained>

Blinking at the sudden end of the tutorial, I stared at my Class EXP total. *Did I just get two levels for doing nothing?* I wasn't going to look twice at the gift, spending it immediately on a level. Shuddering as the after effects ran through me, I shook my limbs out.
This time, I only spent one of my free points to bring Strength up to 10. I didn't know what to spend the other two on, though. *I could start leveling my magic stats… But which one first?*
Thinking about it, I shrugged and dropped the two into the Mana attribute. The tingling was… different this time, though. It felt like something was added, but no matter how long I looked, I couldn't figure out what it was.
With a sigh, I closed all my menus and closed my eyes. *I'll look into it when day comes.*
I was about to resign myself to trying to sleep when I remembered that I had a manual to look at.
I brought up the Vendal Main Menu. It mostly just showed the options for the various system functions, but also included the 'Moderater's Handbook'. With a shrug I opened up and started to look through it. The wording used was specific, cold, and, most of all, incredibly boring.
I was unconscious in less than ten minutes.

Status

Name: Danielle Rosecrest
Age: 17
Race: Human
Class: Noble 3
Class EXP: 14/400
Experience Bank: 0/1000
Unspent Attribute Points: 0

Statistics

Physical
Strength: 10
Dexterity: 12
Agility: 12
Endurance: 10

Constitution: 10

Mental
Intelligence: 14
Insight: 10
Charisma: 12
Perception: 10

Magic
Mana: 1
Mana Control: 1
Mana Power: 1

Skills
Assessment: Tier 0, Rank 2

Traits
Noble Birth
Experience Conversion
Experience Absorbtion
Moderator's Veil
Second Chance

Spells
Healing: Tier 0 Rank 1
Scan: Tier 0 Rank 1

Chapter 4

Status

Name: Danielle Rosecrest
Age: 17
Race: Human
Class: Noble 3
Class EXP: 14/400
Experience Bank: 0/1000
Unspent Attribute Points: 0

Statistics

Physical
Strength: 10
Dexterity: 12
Agility: 12
Endurance: 10
Constitution: 10

Mental
Intelligence: 14
Insight: 10
Charisma: 12
Perception: 10

Magic
Mana: 1
Mana Control: 1
Mana Power: 1

Skills
Assessment: Tier 0, Rank 2

Traits
Noble Birth
Experience Conversion
Experience Absorbtion
Moderator's Veil
Second Chance

Spells
Healing: Tier 0 Rank 1
Scan: Tier 0 Rank 1